

## San Donato in Poggio

In the past, the urban centre of S. Donato in Poggio was one of the principal fortified settlements of the zone. Worthy of the denomination castrum right from 1033, the castle was built high up on the hills separating the valleys of Val di Pesa and Val d'Elsa. The toponymy derives from the denomination of the church as registered in 989 with the name of S. Donato in loco Pocie. Pocie, and subsequently Poce or Poci, was therefore the name of the inhabited settlement, half of which was granted to the fief of the Guidi Counts by Enrico VI in 1901.



In the XII century, the S. Donato in Poggio castle enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and became a free council. In 1218, the castle was definitively subordinated to the Republic of Florence, thereby taking on a considerable strategic importance due to its position on the most direct route of the Strada Romana, the one that linked Florence with Siena. The Florentines and the Siennese concluded a peace treaty at S. Donato in 1255 and the Florentine army assembled in this castle prior to the battle of Montaperti in which they fought the Siennese.

The Aretinian Ghibellines destroyed the medieval settlement in 1289. The only remains of the village fortifications from that period are perhaps the low part of the present-day municipal bell-tower. Reconstruction commenced immediately after the incursion and was financed by the Republic of Florence and by the parson Bernardo Gherardini. A high wall sustained the rampart. A tower and scarp without an internal wall at the major wall formed the two gates to the castle, one facing Florence and the other facing Siena. The ancient keeps or donjon within the inhabited area completed the defence structure. Before long, however, the development of trade and the lack of any further suitable building space within the walled castle area necessitated the development of a new settlement outside the Siennese gate, along the Strada Romana. Consequent to the administrative reorganisation of the country area surrounding Florence, S. Donato was appointed head of a League which covered the territory of three parish jurisdictions: S. Donato, S. Pietro in Bossolo and S. Appiano. A Podestà from the Florentine Republic governed this new administrative organisation.



The magistrature, situated in the town square, now known as Piazza Malaspina, was decorated with a XV century fresco, which may still be viewed. The building was reconstructed in large part after damage suffered during the last war. On the other side of the square were the public cistern, which was rebuilt in 1867, and the castle church dating from the XIV century. The late Renaissance facade of the Ticci Palace (which later passed over to the Malaspina family) united the houses and stores to the north and west of the square. In the village outside the castle, there was a hospital for the poor run by the Augustinian monks, and subsequently run by the St. Maria della Neve confraternity. The early years of the XV century marked the decline of the village. This was due to the greater importance gained by another route of the Strada Romana, which led from Sambuca up to Morrocco and passed through Tavarnelle and Barberino to reach the large centres of the Val d'Elsa valley.

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## Florence

Don't be afraid of driving into Florence, a magnificent Renaissance city, full of churches with Art treasure and home of the Uffizi museum (reservation advisable, can be done though Poggio d'Oro). Using the parking instructions you will find driving into Florence easy and you will encounter some of the best views of the city you are ever likely to see. If, after visit Florence you still have some time follow the signs to Fiesole, a hilltop town 10 km outside Florence, which not only offers spectacular views of the whole of the city, but also has some extremely impressive' Etruscan ruins.



## Siena

This beautiful mediaeval city is a must for anyone visiting the region of Tuscany, especially its unique shall shaped Piazza del Campo, the heart of the city and the pride of the Siennese. Siena is a mediaeval city par excellence, crammed with rich treasures, and far many people it is infinitely more appealing than Florence, the Tuscan capital. All over the city, statues of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf serve as a reminder that, according to the legend, it was founded by Senius, the son of Remus. Siena has many sights to see apart from its beautiful Piazza.



Wednesday morning is market day and the market is held in the car park: there are alternative places to park but Siena will be busier than normal.

## San Gimignano

One of the best preserved medieval cities in Italy, with its famous 13 towers dating back centuries. This unique hilltop town boasts wonderful panoramas and attracts visitors

worldwide. The first sight of S.Gimignano takes your breath away and seems to take you back to another age. Originally there were no fewer than 72 towers (15 survive). They were built thanks to the immense wealth of this free comune's merchant and financial classes, gleaned from their principal trades of saffron and usury (as 13th-century canonical law defined financial speculation).

San Gimignano fell into decline in the 14th century, when its population was decimated by wars, civil strife, famine and plagues. In 1351 the town relinquished its independence and surrendered itself to Florence. In the meantime, an abundance of houses, towers and tower-houses, springs and reservoirs, churches, warehouses, hospices, convents and elegant mansions had grown up along the urban stretch of Via Francigena. Protected by strict monument restrictions since 1929, San Gimignano is an extraordinary living museum. Perhaps it does have a few too many souvenir shops and tourists but come in the low season, on weekdays or at quiet times (before 11,30 am or in the late afternoon) for an unforgettable visit.

## Monteriggioni

North of Siena its fame stems from the fact that it was mentioned in Dante's "Inferno" and, indeed, the fortress of Monteriggioni is breathtaking sight. Once inside the walls of the town there is little else to do except eat, as two excellent restaurants are to be found in the main square.

## Colle Val d'Elsa

Three areas make up Colle Val d'Elsa, developed between the 10th and the 13th century. The lower section, known as Piano, specialised in the manufacture of paper in the Middle Ages, using energy from the waters of the Elsa river. Today Colle Bassa is a major producer of glass and crystal and, as such, has a host of outlets selling crystal at very reasonable prices. The other two sections, Castello and Borgo, together form Colle Alta which is the main attraction, and feature splendid architecture of medieval origin with Renaissance additions. Via del Castello is the site of the centres of secular power, old tower-houses (one is said to have been the birthplace in 1245 of the architect and sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio) and fine 15th- to 16th-century mansions. Wonderfully photogenic and not too full of tourists, Colle Alto provides a very picturesque stop-off on your journey to Siena.



## Volterra

Volterra is a breezy hill-top town, on the west of S.Gimignano with marvellous panoramic views, a well preserved Etruscan amphitheatre and hoards of locally mined alabaster to keep you interested. Worth of half a day visit.

## Montepulciano

45 miles south-east of Siena, Montepulciano is a quaint hilltop (665m) town noted for its red wine, the famous *Vino Nobile*.



## Pienza

Pienza, a town in Tuscany, is the "touchstone of Renaissance urbanism." In 1996, UNESCO declared the town a World Heritage Site and in 2004 the entire valley, the Val d'Orcia, was included on the list of Unesco's World Cultural Landscapes. Pienza was the birthplace of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who would become Pope Pius II. After he became Pope, Piccolomini had the entire village rebuilt as an ideal Renaissance town that would serve as a retreat from Rome. Nearby Monticchiello is definitely worth a visit

## Certaldo

The town consists of two levels, basso (lower) and alto (higher), the higher being the old part of the town. Its narrow streets are lined with restored medieval houses and palazzos. Casa del Boccaccio (Museum) is where the famous

Italian writer is said to have spent his last years.



## Pisa

Everybody has heard of what is undoubtedly the world's most famous tower located in Piazza dei Miracoli (The Square of Miracles) with the cathedral. Pisa is worth half a day visit. Why not combine it with or an afternoon by the sea at Viareggio?



## Lucca

One of the most beautiful small towns in Northern Tuscany, Lucca has tranquillity, which is enchanting. Possessing many architectural and artistic masterpieces. The Piazza Anfiteatro is the most spectacular square in Lucca. Approximately 15 miles inland from Viareggio.

## Viareggio

Half an hour from Pisa, this lively seaside resort is popular with the Florentines in summer. Viareggio has a turn of the century elegance, with many fine Liberty

style buildings.

## The Chianti Classico Wine Area

This is the area to the South East of Florence and North of Siena and has some of the most scenic landscape in the region. Many villages can be explored with panoramic views en route. There are lots of fattoria and cantine (vineyards and wine estates) scattered around the area. Chianti is probably the most famous Italian red wine: in 1984 it was given the highest distinction in Italy, the DOCG (denominazione di origine controllata e garantita). The Growers' Association chose the black cockerel, the Gallo Nero, as its symbol. Wherever you see the sign "Vendita Diretta" outside a vineyard, you may stop and taste by the local wines.

## Castellina in Chianti

As its name suggests, Castellina is built around a splendid castello, which survives at the centre of the town. Magnificently positioned in beautiful countryside scattered with buildings from the era of the grand dukes, Castellina was an important centre of the Chianti league and the town still has its medieval square plan and 15th- to 16th-century houses, dominated by the crenellated tower and castle-keep (14th-15th century). It was restored to its pristine condition in 1927. The town also retains its walls, all part of the medieval defence, strengthened under Florentine rule in the 15th Century. Picturesque views can be enjoyed from the medieval Via delle Volte. On the road to Greve, four Etruscan tombs dating from the 7th to 6th century BC have been excavated from Montecalvario's tumulus.



even more picturesque.

## Radda in Chianti

A place for soaking up the slow pace of life, visitors may relax in one of the prettiest villages in the Chianti region, sampling the wines with Tuscan snacks such as crostini in the local enoteca (wine bar). High on the hill that separates the Pesa Valley from that of the Arbia, Radda was an important castle controlled by Siena until 1176. Under Florence it was fortified and made the capital of the Chianti league (1384). Fine 15th century and 16th century buildings stand out in the medieval centre, which has elliptical plan. Medieval streets can be found around the central Piazza with its stately Palazzo del Podestà. Nearby Volpaia (6 km to the North) a small fortified village and its castle is regarded as

## Greve in Chianti

A pretty market town with a particularly attractive triangular piazza. Now named after the navigator Giovanni da Verrazzano (1480-1528, family castle slightly further north), Greve's large square was once the venue for a major market. Goods were displayed and business was conducted beneath the two wings of terraced porticoes that converge like a funnel towards the church of Santa Croce. Today it makes a delightful place to rest. There are a large number

of small shops, most selling local wines.

In the Middle Ages the town was controlled by the ancient castle of Montefioralle, just west of Greve. The lovely stone village with streets cobbled in a circular pattern and picturesque closed passages is a great place to wander around.

## **Gaiole in Chianti**

Lying on the valley floor, framed by vineyards, this market town developed in the mid-13th century. A hundred years later it joined the Chianti league and its emblem was the black cockerel, still found on DOC bottle labels. This village has a stream running its main street.

Above the town of Gaiole, you can pay a visit to the village of Vèrtine,

A road to the right of the church leads to the 11th Century church at Spaltenna and on to Vertine, a timeless tiny walled village sitting on the top of a vineyard-covered hill, which developed in the 12th and 13th centuries.

## **Barberino Val D'Elsa**

lies in the heart of Tuscany between FLORENCE and SIENA. It is an area that simply pulsates with history and legend. Its a visible history owing to the diffusion of the numerous existing architectural remains. There isn't a hill that does not have a church, a castle, villa or simply a chapel at its top.

This countryside is a highly civilized and humanized one; one that finds the traces from its past nobly framed by its incredible natural beauty. The VALDELSANA area of this municipal territory is made up of hills that are rich in vineyards and olive groves and is dotted here and there with centuries old cypress trees. The hills slope gently down towards the valley of the river ELSA, the ancient Tuscan boundary line that divided once similar but at the same time enemy Tuscan rivals.

This area is recognized as the Chianti Classico belt, Chianti Classico being the prince of Italian wines renowned and appreciated all over the world. Scattered throughout the territory of BARBERINO are also a wide variety of small centres. These centres walled and fortified like castles, each being unique and different from the others within itself but yet each with the same age old memory of art and culture serving as a root and link that unifies this charming land. The centres are: SANT'APPIANO with its romanesque Priory and remains of a Protoromanesque Baptistery; PETROGNANO, the village of Semifonte with its civic flavoured medieval towers; LINARI, an ancient free Commune which is a delightful example of medieval town planning; TIGNANO, a small walled hamlet; VICO D'ELSA with its noble palaces; MONSANTO with its imposing castle; finally worth visiting too with their own particular treasure to discover are MARCIALLA, S.FILIPPO, PONETA, PASTINE and POPPIANO. The chief town BARBERINO has conserved its medieval structure with its walls, gate and towers and its Pilgrims' Hospital; it is found on the road that branched off from the VIA FRANCIGENA in the bottom of the valley and led onto the old Badia a Passignano and then onto Florence. This landscape remains one of the most beautiful of the area.

## **Vinci, the town of Leonardo**

Immersed in the greenery, among vineyards and olive groves. Vinci is situated on the slopes of the Montalbano, delightful hilly massif among the provinces of Florence, Pistoia and Prato.

It is an old village with medieval origins and belonged to the Guidi feudatories until 1254, when it was subdued to Florence. Leonardo was born in Vinci on 15th April 1452 in a locality called Anchiano and in Vinci he spent the years of his childhood: every striking place of the town is linked to his world-wide acknowledged genius. The castle of Conti Guidi is the original part of the built-up area with its still easily visible typical elliptic shape. The impressive fortress, housing one of the two parts of the Museo Leonardiano, stands on the top of the old area, inside are some coats of arms, frescoes and a valuable polychrome terracotta of 1523 attributed to Giovanni Della Robbia.

## **Leonardo Museum**

Housed inside the Palazzina Uzielli and the Castle of the Guidi Counts, the Leonardo Museum can be considered as one of the largest and most unusual collection of machines and models of Leonardo engineer, architect and scientist. Each model is shown together with precise references to the artist's sketches and annotations and in many cases presented with digital reconstructions that show the functioning of the machine. The models on exhibit range among several different study sectors as well as varied and polyhedric are Leonardo's drawings explaining his intuitions or his refinements on machines and mechanism transmitted by the technical literature of the 15th century.

The visit to the Museum begins in Palazzina Uzielli, this houses is the section dedicated to the yard machines and the textile technology. The subjects are presented here through an images-history based on period paintings and manuscripts. On its second floor the Palazzina Uzielli has a space dedicated to temporary exhibitions while a wide didactic room is located in the lounge.

## **Terms of San Giovanni in Rapolano**

Approx 45 min. drive, definitely worth a visit on a sunny fresh day in spring or early fall. Big park of thermal pools with different natural water temperature.

One of the pools with indoor and outdoor sides, spectacular location.

Spa and beauty center offer treatment for every requirement and need, even therapeutic, fitness and rehabilitation.